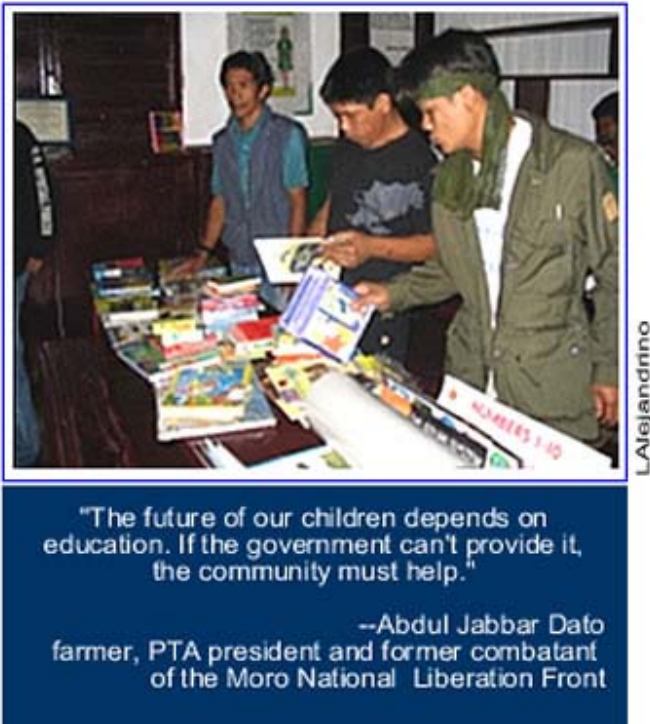




USAID | PHILIPPINES

SUCCESS STORY

MATCHING GRANTS : 100 Matching Grant schools reverse ARMM stereotypes



"The future of our children depends on education. If the government can't provide it, the community must help."

--Abdul Jabbar Dato
farmer, PTA president and former combatant
of the Moro National Liberation Front

In a small classroom deep in the highlands of Lanao del Norte in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), Abdul Jabbar Dato fingers the glossy pages of an English picture dictionary, fresh from its bookstore wrapper, and nods in approval. "Good quality," he says. As head of the parent-teacher association (PTA) of the Tambo Elementary School, and as chair of a farming co-op made up of former combatants of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), he helped collect funds to set up a library for the school, with books on science, math and English.

The Tambo PTA was helped by a matching grant provided through USAID's Growth with Equity in Mindanao (GEM) Program, which, under its Education Awareness Support Effort (EASE) Project, matches funds raised by PTAs and other community groups to improve education in local schools. As of the end of

2004, with the aid of matching grants, more than 100 schools in the ARMM, with more than 94,000 children, had been provided with libraries, science laboratories, multimedia teaching aids, and other facilities.

The Tambo project is a small but significant success story in this part of the Philippines. After decades of armed conflict between the government and the MNLF, many communities in the region remain effectively cut off from the rest of the country, and children in the communities receive only minimal levels of education. This is true even though a peace agreement was signed several years ago. The five provinces that make up the ARMM are the poorest provinces in the country, with the lowest functional literacy rates. Only about one child in 10 graduates from high school.

The impact of a successfully completed Matching Grant activity extends beyond the immediate benefit of having a new microscope or overhead projector. The substantial contribution from the community, as required by the grant program, also helps to alter the public perception of the people of the ARMM, who have often been accused--both inside and outside the region--as lacking concern for their children's education.

Bucking these negative stereotypes, parents and teachers from more than 100 schools, most of them in isolated, poverty-stricken areas like Tambo, have come through with their fifty percent commitment for the Matching Grant by raising funds through members' contributions, talent contests, donations from local firms and civic groups, and the sale of crops grown on campus.

Galvanizing communities into taking action to improve public education is a major objective of the GEM Education Awareness Support Effort (EASE).

Many of the parents involved in the Tambo library project, like Dato, are also among the more than 27,000 MNLF former combatants who got a start in agriculture through the USAID-GEM Livelihood Enhancement and Peace Program. Having a decent livelihood enabled them to plan for their families' future. Dato himself never finished school, but strongly believes in the importance of education. He says: "How else will our children know the right way to live?"